Theological determinism

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Theological determinism is a form of determinism which states that all events that happen are pre-ordained, or predestined to happen, by a God, or that they are destined to occur given its omniscience. Theological determinism exists in a number of religions, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is also supported by proponents of Classical pantheism such as the Stoics and Baruch Spinoza.

Contents

Categorization of theological determinism

Two forms of theological determinism exist, here referenced as strong and weak theological determinism.[1]

- The first one, strong theological determinism, is based on the concept of a creator deity dictating all events in history: "everything that happens has been predestined to happen by an omniscient, omnipotent divinity".[2]
- The second form, weak theological determinism, is based on the concept of divine foreknowledge - "because God's omniscience is perfect, what God knows about the future will inevitably happen, which means, consequently, that the future is already fixed".[3]

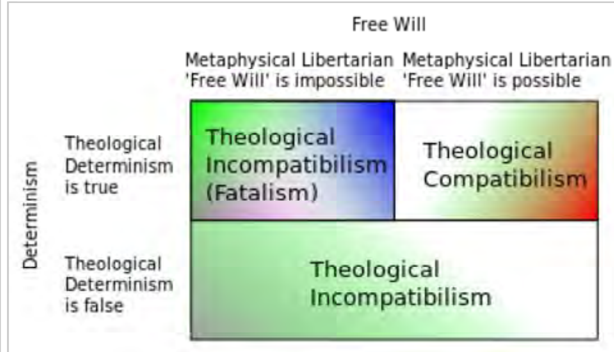
There exist slight variations on the above categorization. Some claim that theological determinism requires predestination of all events and outcomes by the divinity (i.e. they do not classify the weaker version as 'theological determinism' unless libertarian free will is assumed to be denied as a consequence), or that the weaker version does not constitute 'theological determinism' at all.[4] Theological determinism can also be seen as a form of causal determinism, in which the antecedent conditions are the nature and will of God.[5] With respect to free will and the classification of theological compatibilism/incompatibilism below, "theological determinism is the thesis that God exists and has infallible knowledge of all true propositions including propositions about our future actions", more minimal criteria designed to encapsulate all forms of theological determinism.[6]

Free will and theological determinism

There are various implications for metaphysical libertarian free will as consequent of theological determinism and its philosophical interpretation.

- Strong theological determinism is not compatible with metaphysical libertarian free will, and is a form of *hard theological determinism* (equivalent to theological fatalism below). It claims that free will does not exist, and *God* has absolute control over a person's actions. Hard theological determinism is similar in implication to hard determinism, although it does not invalidate compatibilist free will.[7] Hard theological determinism is a form of theological incompatibilism (see figure, top left).

- Weak theological determinism is either compatible or incompatible with metaphysical libertarian free will depending upon one's philosophical interpretation of omniscience - and as such is interpreted as either a form of hard theological determinism (known as theological fatalism), or as *soft theological determinism* (terminology used for clarity only). Soft theological determinism claims that humans have free will to choose their actions, holding that God, whilst knowing their actions before they happen, does not affect the outcome. The belief is that their God's providence is "compatible" with voluntary choice. Soft theological determinism is known as theological compatibilism (see figure, top right).



A simplified taxonomy of philosophical positions regarding free will and theological determinism.[7]

A rejection of theological determinism (or divine foreknowledge) is classified as theological incompatibilism also (see figure, bottom), and is relevant to a more general discussion of free will.[7]

The basic argument for theological fatalism in the case of weak theological determinism is as follows;

1. Assume divine foreknowledge or omniscience
2. Infallible foreknowledge implies destiny (it is known for certain what one will do)
3. Destiny eliminates alternate possibility (one cannot do otherwise)
4. Assert incompatibility with metaphysical libertarian free will

This argument is very often accepted as a basis for theological incompatibilism: denying either libertarian free will or divine foreknowledge (omniscience) and therefore theological determinism. On the other hand, theological compatibilism must attempt to find problems with it. The formal version of the argument rests on a number of premises, many of which have received some degree of contention. Theological compatibilist responses have included;

- Deny the truth value of future contingents, as proposed for example by Aristotle (although this denies foreknowledge and, therefore, theological determinism).
- Assert differences in non-temporal knowledge (space-time independence), an approach taken for example by Boethius,[8] Thomas Aquinas,[9] and C. S. Lewis.[10]
- Deny the Principle of Alternate Possibilities: "If you cannot do otherwise when you do an act, you do not act freely". For example, a human observer could in principle have a machine that could detect what will happen in the future, but the existence of this machine or their use of it has no influence on the outcomes of events.[11]

History

Many Christians have opposed the view that humans do not have free will. Saint Thomas Aquinas, the medieval Roman Catholic theologian, believed strongly that humanity had free will. (However, though he desired to defend a doctrine of free will, he ultimately ended up espousing what today would be known as compatibilism, or "soft determinism.")[12] The Jesuits were among the leading opponents of this view, because they held that divine grace was actual, in the sense that grace is among other things participative, and that humans could freely benefit from grace by a mediation between their own imperfect wills and the infinite mercy of God.

Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus

The concept of theological determinism has its origins within the Bible as well as within the Christian church. A major theological dispute at the time of the sixteenth century would help to force a distinct division in ideas - with an argument between two eminent thinkers of the time, Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther, a leading Protestant Reformer. Erasmus in *Discourses On the Freedom of the Will* believed that God created human beings with free will.

He maintained that despite the fall of Adam and Eve freedom still existed. As a result of this humans had the ability to do good or evil. Luther, conversely attacked this idea in *On the Bondage of the Will*. He recognised that the issue of autonomy lay at the heart of religious dissension. He depicted an image of humanity manipulated through sin. Humans, for Luther, know what is morally right but are unable to attain it. He claimed that humans thus must give up aspiring to do good, as only by this could salvation be formed. Luther also believed that the fall of Adam and Eve as written in the Bible supported this notion.

See also

- Determinism
- Calvinism
- Jansenism
- Predestination
- Free will
- Theological fatalism
- Occasionalism

External links

- Theological Determinism (https://web.archive.org/web/20070708171428/http://www.faithnet.org.uk/Theology/theologicaldeterminism.htm)

References

1. Anne Lockyer Jordan; Anne Lockyer Jordan Neil Lockyer Edwin Tate; Neil Lockyer; Edwin Tate (25 June 2004). *Philosophy of Religion for A Level OCR Edition*. Nelson Thornes. p. 211. ISBN 978-0-7487-8078-5. Retrieved 22 December 2012.
2. A. Pabl Iannone (2001). "determinism". *Dictionary of World Philosophy*. Taylor & Francis. p. 194. ISBN 978-0-415-17995-9. Retrieved 22 December 2012. "theological determinism, or the doctrine of predestination: the view that everything which happens has been predestined to happen by an omniscient, omnipotent divinity. A weaker version holds that, though not predestined to happen, everything that happens has been eternally known by virtue of the divine foreknowledge of an omniscient divinity. If this divinity is also omnipotent, as in the case of the Judeo-Christian religions, this weaker version is hard to distinguish from the previous one because, though able to prevent what happens and knowing that it is going to happen, God lets it happen. To this, advocates of free will reply that God permits it to happen in order to make room for the free will of humans."
3. Wentzel Van Huyssteen (2003). "theological determinism". *Encyclopedia of science and religion*. **1**. Macmillan Reference. p. 217. ISBN 978-0-02-865705-9. Retrieved 22 December 2012. "Theological determinism constitutes a fifth kind of determinism. There are two types of theological determinism, both compatible with scientific and metaphysical determinism. In the first, God determines everything that happens, either in one all-determining single act at the initial creation of the universe or through continuous divine interactions with the world. Either way, the consequence is that everything that happens becomes God's action, and determinism is closely linked to divine action and God's omnipotence. According to the second type of theological determinism, God has perfect knowledge of everything in the universe because God is omniscient. And, as some say, because God is outside of time, God has the capacity of knowing past, present, and future in one instance. This means that God knows what will happen in the future. And because God's omniscience is perfect, what God knows about the future will inevitably happen, which means, consequently, that the future is already fixed."
4. Raymond J. VanArragon (21 October 2010). *Key Terms in Philosophy of Religion*. Continuum International Publishing Group. p. 21. ISBN 978-1-4411-3867-5. Retrieved 22 December 2012. "Theological determinism, on the other hand, claims that all events are determined by God. On this view, God decree that everything will go thus-and-so and ensure that everything goes that way, so that ultimately God is the cause of everything that happens and everything that happens is part of God's plan. We might think of God here as the all-powerful movie director who writes script and causes everything to go accord with it. We should note, as an aside, that there is some debate over what would be sufficient for theological determinism to be true. Some people claim that God's merely knowing what will happen determines that it will, while others believe that God must not only know but must also cause those events to occur in order for their occurrence to be determined."
5. Eshleman, Andrew (2009). "Moral Responsibility". In Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 ed.).
6. Vihvelin, Kadri (2011). "Arguments for Incompatibilism". In Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 ed.).

7. Zagzebski, Linda (2011). "Foreknowledge and Free Will". In Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 ed.). See also McKenna, Michael (2009). "Compatibilism". In Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 ed.).
8. Boethius. "Book V, Prose vi". *The Consolation of Philosophy*.
9. Aquinas, St. Thomas. "Ia, q. 14, art 13.". *Summa Theologica*. See Summa Theologica
10. C. S. Lewis (1980). *Mere Christianity*. Touchstone:New York. p. 149.
11. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (25 April 1996). "chapter 6, section 2.1". *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-510763-0. Retrieved 22 December 2012.
12. Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 77.